

# ADOPTED RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED 12/08/04

(Actions taken are denoted in blue)

## Virginia Commission on Youth Study on Strengthening Families

### Findings/Conclusions

#### Lack of Statewide Coordination and Collaboration

States are beginning to explore programs that strengthen marriage, encourage responsible fatherhood and parenting, and provide parenting skills to low-income parents as a component of their welfare services. These policies stem from the goal of the federal Welfare Reform Act that encourages the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Virginia does not have such a coordinated statewide effort. In 10 states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah), the governor, legislators, or other high ranking policy officials have publicly focused on ways to strengthen the family, particularly strengthening marriage and two-parent families. Other states have launched major policy initiatives, including the enactment of laws or executive-branch actions that establish and fund programs designed specifically to promote and strengthen marriage and reduce divorce rates. Moreover, statewide summits, media campaigns, proclamations, or handbooks have been developed, focusing on marriage-strengthening policies or other means of strengthening fragile families.

Given the positive effects of marriage on family stability, income, and children's outcomes, policymakers nationwide have been discussing the role of government in promoting healthy marriage, especially among low-income families. However, it is important to note that marriage is not a social policy solution. A marriage with serious conflict is often worse for children's well-being than divorce or single-parenthood. State initiatives should consider how to design programs that support healthy marriages, as opposed to encouraging marriage or discouraging divorce on a broad scale.

### Recommendations

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

##### **Option 1 - Strengthening Family Statewide Task Force & Plan**

Introduce a budget amendment directing the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Task Force for the purpose of developing a plan to assess, identify, and communicate ways to strengthen families within the Commonwealth. *The Statewide Task Force shall also focus on existing efforts and make recommendations for linking and integrating such efforts.* All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this effort. Members shall include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, *the Virginia Department of Health*, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. The Secretary of Health and Human Resources shall report the plan to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees and the Virginia Commission on Youth by November 30 of each year.

##### **Option 2 - Strengthening Family Summit** *(Note-contingent upon first recommendation passing)*

In 2006, introduce a budget amendment directing the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Summit charged with assessing, identifying, and communicating ways to strengthen families in the Commonwealth. This shall be pursuant to §63.2-703. Topics

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<p><b><u>Limited Access to Data on Virginia's Marriage and Divorce Rates</u></b></p> <p>Families have undergone a transformation in the last 30 years: divorce rates have increased, fertility has declined, and marriage and childbearing have been postponed to later ages. The Regional Focus Groups and the Statewide Advisory Group convened by the Commission on Youth stated that access to data on Virginia's incidence of marriage and divorce was needed and would be extremely beneficial for policy formulation, planning, and program delivery.</p> <p>Virginia relies heavily upon private-providers, the faith-based community, and localities in providing services to help sustain healthy marriages, avoid unhealthy marriages, and to improve child outcomes by promoting stable homes. Marriage and divorce data, although collected by the Virginia Department of Health's State Registrar of Vital Records and Health Statistics, is</p>	<p>addressed shall include community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this summit. Members shall include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Department of Education, <i>the Virginia Department of Health</i>, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and private sector organizations that serve families and children, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. This summit shall be convened prior to the 2007 General Assembly Session, with a report of the findings from the summit being submitted to the Virginia Commission on Youth.</p> <p><i>Option 1 and 2 were amended and adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 1.</i></p> <p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 2</u></b>  <b>Option 1 - Collection of Data on Marriage and Divorce Rates</b></p> <p>Amend the Code of Virginia to direct the State Registrar of the Virginia Department of Health to compile, publish, and distribute <i>aggregate</i> data on the number of marriages and divorces that occur each year within the Commonwealth. Such information shall be broken down by locality and include information regarding age, race, <del>income</del>, and any other pertinent information. Such information shall be posted on the agency website. Additionally, the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth shall request, via letter, that the Virginia</p>

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<p>not readily available. Pursuant to § 32.1-267, the State Registrar is charged with collecting records showing personal data for the married parties, the marriage license, and the certifying statement of the facts of marriage. Moreover, pursuant to § 32.1-268, the State Registrar is charged with collecting information on the final decree or divorce or annulment of marriage granted by a court in the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Access to this type of data is also needed to identify trends, such as the percentage of children living with two biological parents over a certain length of time or the percentage of couples that are cohabiting over time. This will assist policymakers to determine Virginia's ability to target resources and programs to specific regions and help in developing program goals and strategies.</p> <p><b><u>Need for a Comprehensive Statewide Information System for Child and Family Services</u></b></p> <p>In Virginia, there is no single source or information clearinghouse for families or those working with children and families that provides information about organizations or services as a resource for children, adolescents, and families, which enables improved access to health, education, juvenile justice, mental health, mental retardation, and substance abuse services, educational resources, and supports. A clearinghouse could be a timesaving and vital link to information on services for youth and families, community members, professionals, and policy makers. The clearinghouse could include information on issues related to the skills needed and resources available for parents and caregivers of young children. Such a resource could</p>	<p>Department of Health report on its progress to the members of the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.</p> <p><i>Option 1 was amended and both Option 1 and Option 2 were adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 2.</i></p> <p><b>Option 2 - Collection of Data on Local and Regional Service Barriers and Needs</b></p> <p>Request, by letter, that the Virginia Municipal League (VML) and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, conduct a statewide survey ascertaining existing partnerships and best practices that strengthen Virginia's families. The survey will include questions on program strengths at the regional level, barriers that exist in serving families and solutions/programs that can address these gaps or barriers. The results of the survey shall be communicated to the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.</p> <p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 3</u></b></p> <p><b>Option 1 - Inclusion of all family and child serving agencies in the I&amp;R System.</b></p> <p>Introduce a budget amendment directing that all state and local child-serving agencies within the Commonwealth be included in the Virginia Statewide Information and Referral System (I&amp;R System). The Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Public Safety shall assist in this effort by requesting all agencies they oversee to submit information to the I&amp;R System.</p> <p><b>Option 2 - Training and Education on the I&amp;R System</b></p> <p>Introduce a budget amendment directing the Department of Social Services to communicate with all child-serving agencies</p>

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<p>potentially broaden the scope of information and collaboration among service providers and strengthen service delivery to children, adolescents, providers, and their families.</p> <p><u>Senior Navigator</u> While Virginia does not possess such a clearinghouse for children, there is such a resource for the aging population. Senior Navigator provides free information about the health and aging resources available to Virginians. The information focuses on senior-related issues such as health and aging, financial concerns, legal questions, health facilities, assisted living and housing, exercise programs, support groups and more. Thus, it is possible to create a clearinghouse to serve a specific population.</p> <p><u>Virginia's Information and Referral System</u> Virginia has a resource in existence that could potentially serve as a clearinghouse for children, families, and other family serving entities. The Virginia Information and Referral (I&amp;R) System has existed for almost a quarter of a century. Section 63.2-222 of the Code of Virginia established a statewide I&amp;R system which is designed to collect and maintain accurate and complete resource data on a statewide basis. The I&amp;R system:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collects and maintains accurate and complete resource data on a statewide basis;</li> <li>2. Links citizens needing human services with appropriate community resources to satisfy those needs;</li> <li>3. Assists in planning for human services delivery at the local, regional and state levels; and</li> <li>4. Provides information to assist decision-makers in allocating financial and other resources to respond to state and local human service priorities.</li> </ol> <p><u>Administrative Oversight of Virginia's I&amp;R System</u> Pursuant to § 63.2-226, the Department of Social Services has administrative responsibilities for the statewide system. Services</p>	<p>located within the Commonwealth about the availability of the statewide I&amp;R System and that all child-serving agencies located within the Commonwealth be informed and trained on the availability of the I&amp;R System, as outlined in § 63.2-226 of the Code of Virginia. This information shall also be communicated via the Department of Social Services' broadcast system on their agency-wide Intranet so that all local and regional offices can be better informed about the Statewide I&amp;R System. Moreover, information on the Statewide I&amp;R System shall be included within the Department's electronic mailings to all local and regional offices at least <b>biannually</b>.</p> <p><b>Option 3 - Marketing and Promoting Virginia's I&amp;R System</b> Introduce a budget amendment directing the Department of Social Services to work with I&amp;R providers and other public and private partners to develop strategies to market and promote Virginia's I&amp;R System, along with the 211-phone campaign currently under development. A report on these activities shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.</p> <p><b>Option 4 - 211 System</b> Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&amp;R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211. (Verizon is charging a considerably higher connection fee than the other companies.)</p> <p><b>Option 5 - Implementation of a 211 System in Virginia</b> Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Governor encouraging him to contact the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&amp;R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211.</p>

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<p>may be accessed through a toll-free number (800-230-6977) which is automatically routed directly to one of six regional providers. A database is available on the Internet at <a href="http://www.vaiandr.com">http://www.vaiandr.com</a>.</p> <p>The sole source contractor for FY 2004-2006 is the Council of Community Services, located in Roanoke, Virginia. Virginia's system is divided into six regions with information and referral programs and partners serving each region. The six centers are: Council of Community Services (Roanoke), Family Resource &amp; Referral Center (Staunton), Northern Virginia Regional Commission (Annandale), the Planning Council (Norfolk), United Way of Central Virginia (Lynchburg), and the United Way of Greater Richmond &amp; Petersburg (Richmond).</p> <p><u>Funding and Results of the Virginia I&amp;R System</u></p> <p>The Virginia Department of Social Services provides \$755,665 in funds to the sole source contractor to provide information and referral services. Of this amount, 88 percent are federal funds and 12 percent are state funds. Currently, the cost to operate the statewide system is \$1,664,817 annually, with providers funding the difference from other contracts or regional and local funds. Funding has remained stagnant for the past six years.</p> <p>The I&amp;R database lists more than 7,219 organizations and 20,044 human service programs throughout the state. The I&amp;R system assisted 153,154 citizens last year and provided more than 163,869 referrals to residents of Virginia to help them access human service organizations throughout Virginia.</p> <p><u>Structure of Virginia's I&amp;R Website</u></p> <p>Some states' I&amp;R/211 systems use client-based servers while some use web-based systems. However, the current system - which is client-server based - is in use because it was less expensive when implemented and because a web-based system might be down when the Internet is not available. This could</p>	<p><b>Option 6 - Increase Funding for I&amp;R System</b> Introduce a budget amendment increasing funding for Virginia's I&amp;R system to allow for implementation of the statewide, 24-hour 211 system.</p> <p><b>Option 7 - Improving Virginia's I&amp;R Website</b> Introduce a budget amendment directing the Department of Social Services, in conjunction with Virginia Information and Technologies Agency, to develop a plan to modify Virginia's current I&amp;R System webpage to make it more comprehensive and user-friendly. This plan shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees, as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.</p> <p><a href="#">Option 1 through Option 7 were adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 3.</a></p>

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<p>hamper I&amp;R efforts when they are particularly needed, such as after Hurricane Isabel. Other variables also must be considered, such as incorporating information from other sources.</p> <p>The statewide I&amp;R website received an average of 9,910 web page hits a month (118,921 per year). Visitor hits average 1,600 per month (19,203 per year).</p> <p><u>Future Plans of Virginia I&amp;R System</u></p> <p>The number 211 is a national abbreviated dialing code that offers free access to health and human information and referral services. The goal is for the number to be universally recognizable, making a critical connection between individuals and families in needs and the appropriate community based organization and government agencies. Virginia's I&amp;R System and the Virginia Department of Social Services have partnered to expand the current I&amp;R System to a 211 system to make it a more accessible and user-friendly service. With the implementation of 211 Virginia, all participants can offer the citizens of Virginia greater access to the resources contained in the I&amp;R system. At this time, the efforts have been stalled due to extensive contract negotiations. Verizon is charging a considerably higher connection fee (\$70,800) than the other companies. Some of the other phone companies are charging a fee but nothing as high as Verizon. The second highest fee is approximately one-tenth of the Verizon fee.</p> <p><u>Need for Stronger Education Efforts in Healthy Relationships</u></p> <p>The formation and maintenance of two-parent families is one of the four overarching goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). This goal reflects a growing recognition by researchers, advocates,</p>	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 4</u></p> <p><b>Option 1 - Character Education Requirements</b></p> <p>Amend § 22.1-208.01 to modify the current character education requirements to include instruction in healthy</p>

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<p>policymakers, and service providers of the economic, emotional, and societal benefits of two-parent families, particularly for children. Research supports the belief that family formation and maintenance can play a crucial role in reducing many poor families' dependency on public assistance. States have the flexibility to design programs and policies to encourage family formation, as well as to support responsible parenting by both parents in situations where marriage is not feasible.</p> <p><u>Youth Education</u>            Surveys reveal that many youth and adolescents desire to marry, but are pessimistic since they may have experienced divorce in their homes. Studies have shown that children learn about relationships and marital commitment by observation. Skills that can assist youth in building strong relationships and avoiding conflict are frequently not taught in the home. Only 40 percent of American children reach age 18 with the marriage of their biological father and mother intact (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2001).</p> <p>Most education efforts in this arena have focused on adults contemplating marriage, unwed parents, and couples at risk of divorce. However, several states have taken preventive steps to educate youth about what is necessary in order to have healthy relationships and how to assist them to build the skills necessary for strong relationships. High schools in several states offer some type of marriage education course. Florida requires all high school students to complete a class in relationships and marriage. The Florida Marriage and Preservation Act of 1998 mandates instruction in marriage skills education for all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Utah also offers courses that focus on a range of issues including dating, money management, communication, marriage preparation, and parenting skills. Other states have integrated existing efforts within the community to teach about healthy relationship skills.</p>	<p>relationship skills and the importance of making healthy relationship choices.</p> <p><b>Option 2 - Character Education Funding</b>            Introduce a budget amendment for the Department of Education to appropriate funding for one full-time equivalent position (FTE) for Virginia's Character Education Program.</p> <p><b>Option 3 - Family Life Education</b>            By letter, request the Board of Education to consider including instruction in healthy relationship skills and the importance of making healthy relationship choices in its family life education requirements.</p> <p><b>Option 4 - Study of Other States' Education Efforts</b>            By letter or resolution, request the Virginia Department of Health to study other states' mandated marriage education initiatives to see how such initiatives can best be employed within the Commonwealth. This study shall include information on effectiveness of premarital education, marriage and relationship skill-based education at the secondary level and premarital education for couples seeking to obtain a marriage license. Instruction on conflict resolution, communication skills, financial responsibilities, children and parenting and data on problems married couples face and their effectiveness shall be examined. The results of this study shall be submitted to the Virginia General Assembly and the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.</p> <p><i>Option 1, Option 2, Option 3, and Option 4 were tabled by the Commission. Accordingly, Recommendation 4 failed to report.</i></p>



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<p><u>Virginia's Character Education Program</u></p> <p>In Virginia, character education is a program administered by the local school boards. Virginia Code § 22.1-208.01 requires local school boards to establish a character education program in their schools, to improve the learning environment, promote student achievement, reduce disciplinary problems and develop civic-minded students of high character. Character education is presently funded by a federal grant that will expire at the end of June 2005. The Department of Education does not have a position to support character education at the state level.</p> <p><u>Virginia's Family Life Education</u></p> <p>Virginia's Board of Education, in 1988, issued regulations mandating that all local school boards provide "comprehensive, sequential family life education" for grades K-12, including age-appropriate instruction on family living and community relationships; the value of postponing sexual activity; human sexuality; human reproduction; the prevention and effects of STDs; and mechanisms for coping with peer pressure.</p> <p>Curriculum matters are left to the local schools, as outlined in by regulation (8VAC20-170-10). The Board of Education Guidelines on Family Life Education (2002) outlines instruction on the etiology, prevention and effects of STDs, including AIDS, and choices involving unwanted pregnancies. The Virginia Administrative Code (8VAC20-131-170) states, "each school may implement the Standards of Learning for the Family Life Education program promulgated by the board or a Family Life Education program consistent with the guidelines developed by the board."</p> <p>The Virginia Administrative Code (8VAC20-170-10) also allows parents to remove a student "from class for the duration of the treatment of a sensitive or controversial topic." In addition, the Board of Education Guidelines for Family Life Education calls for</p>	



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<p>an "opt-out" procedure that allows parents or guardians to excuse students from all or part of the program.</p> <p><b><u>Education for Adults and High Risk Populations</u></b>  There is a gap in services available to adults, particularly adults transitioning from the correctional setting into the community. Programs that provide life/work skills and leadership training for individuals needing a second chance (reentering ex-offenders) assist in fostering community revitalization. Moreover, such programs connect culturally and economically disadvantaged communities and provide training in life skills, job skills, leadership models, and one-on-one coaching to unemployed primarily previously incarcerated individuals.</p> <p><b><u>Mentoring Model</u></b>  Mentorship is firmly grounded in the notion that individuals develop according to the way they make use of knowledge in the environment. Mentoring programs, in accordance with the guidelines under Welfare-to-Work, TANF, and VIEW, are aimed at helping clients achieve self-sufficiency. Help is provided according to the client's needs, including budgeting, parenting skills, nutrition education, etc. Mentors have a positive impact that helps ex-offenders avoid patterns of negative behavior, supports strong families, and contributes to public safety. Through Virginia's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, staff at the Department of Social Services is currently assisting their local agencies and other community-based organizations to establish mentoring programs in support of self-sufficiency and strong families.</p> <p><b><u>National Governor's Association Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy</u></b>  Virginia participates in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. NGA's Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy is working with seven states to develop</p>	<p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 5</u></b>  <b>Option 1 - Family to Family Mentoring - Adults</b>  Request by letter that the Virginia Department of Social Services to encourage localities to utilize "family to family" mentoring. This program model helps low-income families move toward financial self-sufficiency by providing training and technical assistance to existing and developing mentoring programs to increase the number and quality of mentoring relationships for children and youth at risk, and adults in transition from welfare to work.</p> <p><b>Option 2 - Support Virginia's Involvement in the NGA Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy</b>  Request the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Secretary of Public Safety and Secretary of Health supporting Virginia's participation in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. Moreover, request the Virginia Policy Academy to consider incorporating messages about the benefits of healthy relationships and strong families in program formulation, <i>as well as the importance of transition plans and services for juveniles returning to the community.</i></p> <p><i>Option 1 and 2 were adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 5.</i></p>

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<p>strategic action plans for prisoner reentry that coordinate services across agencies, both at the state and local level, and build on lessons from current research. The other participating states are Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and Rhode Island.</p> <p>Currently, Virginia is in the process of developing a Prisoner Reentry Plan. Strategies to support and strengthen families are also being considered such as the development of mentoring programs to prepare both offenders and their families for reentry. Mentors will be used to work with newly-released offenders and their families. Emphasis will be placed on showing participants how to avoid patterns of negative behavior to promote public safety, strong families, and stable communities.</p> <p><b><u>Continuation of Current Education Efforts in Virginia</u></b> In 2003, the Virginia Department of Social Services, through the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative, awarded grants to organizations that provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. The Department offered \$300,000 in grants to organizations seeking to achieve these goals. The grant cycle commenced in October of 2003 and was extended through September of 2004. Participants included community and faith-based organizations, non-profits and public agencies. Grant awards ranged from \$15,000 through \$30,000. The grant was to promote innovative approaches to locally identified needs. Projects included activities such as classes, seminars, workshops, inventories, conferences, support groups, and preventive counseling designed for use before, after, or at any stage in a marriage. Project areas included the following elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training to form and sustain a stable family and healthy marriage. Participants included married or single adults, program staff, marriage program leaders, facilitators, and</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 6</u></b> <b>Option 1 - Continuation of Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative Grants</b> Introduce a budget amendment directing the Virginia Department of Social Services to continue funding for the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative grants to provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. Such grant activities will address training needs, parenting programs, youth programs, programs for newlyweds, community marriage initiatives, and healthy relationship promotion. Such grants shall be funded by the Federal Safe and Stable Families or other appropriate funds.</p> <p>Option 1 was adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 6.</p>

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<p>mentors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Parenting programs were developed or current programs were enhanced to incorporate a marriage component and topics such as communication, conflict resolution, and relationship-building skills.</li> <li>3. Youth programs were offered to ensure that local teenagers would be better prepared for healthy dating relationships and marriage.</li> <li>4. Education in healthy relationship was offered to assist single parents in forming constructive relationships that are conducive to building a healthy relationship for the child and the non-custodial parent. Singles that have experiences abuse or domestic violence were also educated in making healthy relationship choices and given tools in how to build healthy families and marriages.</li> <li>5. Newlywed programs were developed at the community-level to provide support for the newly married.</li> <li>6. Community marriage initiatives were developed with the purpose of forming effective community networks or Marriage Task Force that would promote better public understanding of what healthy relationships require along with education regarding resource availability. Support groups or activities were also offered in order to better promote healthy marriages.</li> </ol> <p><b><u>Lack of a Family Advocacy Network in Virginia</u></b>  As noted by the State Executive Council's Custody Relinquishment Workgroup, the Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' Special Populations Workgroup, and the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' 330 F (Budget directive) Workgroup. Virginia lacks a strong, organized family advocacy network. Such networks have proven in other states to be effective resources in helping families and children navigate the complex public and private systems of children's</p>	<p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 7</u></b>  <b>Option 1 - Family Advocacy Network</b>  Request the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to lead a collaborative effort with other child serving departments, parents, and advocacy organizations to develop and implement a statewide parent/family resource and advocacy program that is coordinated with existing programs. This is also a recommendation from the State Executive Council Study on Relinquishment of Custody Study as well as from the</p>

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<p>services. These networks have also successfully advocated for system improvement.</p> <p><b><u>Commission on Youth Continuation of Strengthening Family Efforts</u></b></p> <p>In 2004, the Commission on Youth hosted several regional focus groups to more closely examine the local barriers that caregivers, parents, providers, and policymakers face in serving this population. The focus groups discussed issues specific to their regions and developed strategies to aid in strengthening the Commonwealth's family service system. In addition, a statewide Advisory Group was convened to assist with reviewing the focus groups' findings. The Advisory Group also formulated initial recommendations that would assist in strengthening family service systems within the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Pertinent issues to this study were identified and evaluated by systemic and economic impacts. Barriers and solutions were identified by both the regional focus groups and the Statewide Advisory Group that require further analysis and study. Several regional best practices were identified by the regional focus group participants; however, more evaluation needs to be conducted to ascertain whether these approaches can be applied effectively across the Commonwealth.</p>	<p>330 F Report (2004). The Secretary shall report on these efforts to the Chair of the Commission of Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.</p> <p><a href="#">Option 1 was adopted by the Commission and incorporated into the Commission's Recommendation 7.</a></p> <p><b><u>RECOMMENDATION 8</u></b>  <b>Option 1 - Continuation of Study Efforts</b>  Request that the Commission on Youth monitor efforts taking place in the Commonwealth regarding efforts to strengthen families and update the Commission on Youth on such developments prior to the 2006 General Assembly.</p>